



Church of Christ

100 Rena Road Van Buren Arkansas 72956

The Gospel Plan of Salvation

Part 1 (Hearing the Gospel)

Once when I was teaching a Wednesday evening Bible class one of the ladies in the class spoke up. As a part of what she said, she commented on what she referred to as, The so-called plan of salvation. For those of you who may not be familiar with what we in the church of Christ believe concerning salvation, allow me to offer this brief explanation. Someone, years ago, boiled down God's plan for saving man into a simple formula. It was in no way intended to ever be a formal church doctrine or creed, but rather a helpful, five-step guide to lead the lost to Christ. The formula was this, **1 Hear, 2 Believe, 3 Repent, 4 Confess, 5 Be Baptized**. This formula has been used extensively for many years and has proven to be quite reliable. I was unfamiliar, at the time, with hearing a member of the church questioning the validity of that plan.

Being dedicated to the continuing work of fully restoring New Testament Christianity to be a Christian and serve God in as biblically accurate a manner as possible, I have come to believe that it is a good and necessary thing for us in the church of Christ to continually question the biblical soundness of what we preach. Therefore, for the next few weeks, Lord willing, I will attempt to test the validity of this formula.

The apostle Paul, quoting from the prophet Joel, wrote, Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Joel 2:32). Paul, himself, knew that this statement was somewhat ambiguous and therefore he offered an explanation. He wrote, How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:13-14). Certainly, it should go without saying that before one can believe in Christ (John 3:16) or obey the gospel (2Thessalonians 1:6-10), that one must first hear the word of God. There are, however, those who teach that all one must do to be saved is to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and accept Him as the Savior. Not being satisfied with that teaching, I believe that hearing the complete gospel of Christ should be stressed so that there can be no misunderstanding it. As Paul continued, So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17). If the apostle Paul was concerned enough to stress the importance of hearing the word of God, so should we be.

Part 2 (Believing the Gospel)

A couple of weeks ago, I began a series of articles in which I intend to examine the validity and also the reliability of the so-called plan of salvation. Allow me again to state my opinion that the formula of Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, Be Baptized was never intended to be a formal church doctrine or creed, but rather a helpful, five-step guide to lead the lost to Christ.

Allow me also to state that it is my full understanding and belief that the biblical requirements for salvation are far more comprehensive and life-consuming than these initial five steps which say nothing, for example, of the necessity of daily devotion, church involvement, partaking of the Lord's Supper, prayer, etc. These too, along with many other commands are biblical requirements and a part of God's overall plan for saving man.

The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote, Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6). One might assume that most everyone agrees that belief is a requirement for biblical salvation. There is, however, some disagreement about what exactly we must believe. Certainly, from a biblical standpoint, we must believe that there is a God and that Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God, sent to save those who believe (John 3:16). Since faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), we must also believe that the Bible is God's word, and that therein is contained God's plan for saving man. Jesus sent out the apostles with these words, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:15-16). In this context Jesus is not talking about the basic belief in God, but rather believing the gospel (good news of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection (1Cor. 15:1-4). Common sense tells us that when one hears the gospel that believing it is essential to salvation. Where we often differ, however, is in our beliefs concerning baptism. Jesus didn't mention baptism as an after thought, but rather as a pre-requisite for salvation. It is clear that if we are baptized without an accurate belief in the nature and necessity of it that our baptism was ineffective and therefore it was not biblical, New Testament, baptism at all.

Belief in God (i.e. faith) is unquestionably essential for salvation. What you believe about God requires diligent seeking. Let us not be satisfied with what man says we must believe, but rather let us search the scriptures openly and honestly to find out what we must believe.

Part 3 (Repenting of Sins)

We have already looked at Hearing and Believing the Gospel. It is clear to me that these first two steps, have not only strong New Testament support, but they also make good common sense. For example, if one never heard the gospel how could that one possibly believe in something that he/she knows nothing about (Romans 10:14)?

The third step in the plan is to Repent. The word translated repent literally means to perceive afterwards, and it signifies to change one's mind or purpose (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words pp. 279-280). To truly change one's mind or purpose is not an easy thing to do. It must be preceded by a great personal conviction. From the New Testament perspective repentance means to change one's mind from a purpose that leads to destruction to the purpose that leads to eternal life (Matthew 7:13-14). On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the Jews, after being convinced of their guilt in crucifying Jesus their Lord and Christ, were commanded to Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). They had done a terrible thing which they had no ability to change. They had only the power to change their mind and purpose.

In 2 Corinthians 7:1-12 the apostle Paul described what happened as a result of repentance in the church at Corinth. He wrote, Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. (vv.10-11). As we can see, along with change of mind and purpose we are led to change what we can change and accept the reality of what we cannot change.

Repentance, however, is not said to take away sin, but rather it produces in us a desire to be vindicated. While it is certainly a requirement for salvation,

it is only a step in the process.

Part 4 (Confessing Christ)

I acknowledge that any system of doctrine that comes from man, even if it gives merely the appearance of impropriety, if it makes us appear denominational, we would be better off never mentioning it. My question is, How can something so Biblically based be considered to have come from man rather than from God? Let us consider this further.

The fourth step in the plan is to Confess. The critical question here is, when exactly does salvation occur? Many believe and teach that one is saved at the point when they confess Christ, or call on His name, and therefore, give themselves to Him. This contention, in my understanding, is based on the concept that by grace you have been saved through faith, not of works lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus said, Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32). Paul wrote, If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' (Romans 10:9-13).

The above passages, and others, removed from their immediate context and from the overall context of the Bible, would make it appear that all one has to do to be saved is believe and call on the name of Jesus. For example, when Paul continued in Romans ten, he wrote, How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" (vv. 14-16). If, as claimed, one is saved at the moment that they believe and call on the name of Jesus, what then is this reference to obeying the gospel?

Jesus said, Go into all the world and preach the gospel. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. (Mark 16:15-16). Ananias said to Saul, Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. (Acts 22:26). Confession/calling on the name of the Lord is essential to salvation, but nowhere does the Bible claim that believing in Jesus and calling on His name is all that is required for salvation.

Part 5 (Water Immersion for the Remission of Sins)

Jesus commissioned His apostles to, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but, he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:15-16). In obedience to this command, the apostles went and preached the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, to Jews and Gentiles alike, and commanded the people to, Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; (Acts 2:38).

In Jesus' own words baptism precedes salvation (Mark 16:16). Peter and Paul also said that baptism causes the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16). In baptism we come into contact with the blood of Christ. To the Christians at Rome the apostle Paul wrote, As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4). In baptism we find entrance into Christ. Paul wrote, As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:27). Peter wrote, baptism saves us (1Peter 3:21). Baptism is not a sign of salvation, but rather a New Testament requirement for salvation.

Hear the gospel, believe it, repent of your sins, call on the name of Christ, and be immersed in water. These are all New Testament requirements for the forgiveness of all your past sins. Without the forgiveness of sins one is not redeemed and therefore cannot be reconciled to God. These, therefore are all preliminary steps in God's plan of salvation.